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# **Grounding to Place and Past: Motherhood in the Novels of Native American Writers Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan**

by

**Elise Doney**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

in

**Literary Studies  
in the Department of English**

**Approved:**

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, UT**

**Spring 2009**

## **Grounding to Place and Past: Motherhood in the Novels of Native American Writers**

**Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan**

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*“Grounded Indian literature is tribal; its fulcrum is a sense of relatedness”*

*- Kenneth Lincoln*

### **Abstract:**

The interconnectedness in both form and content of Native American literature originates from the complex relationship between cultural and personal identity as inextricably intertwined with spiritual and natural realms. In Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* and Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* and *Power* motherhood lies at the center of this interconnected web of relationships among identity, community, tradition, and landscape. Each novel centers on a protagonist who is, in some form, distanced from her primary mother/daughter relationship, consequently literally and figuratively displaced. The disrupted maternal relationship results in the child’s displacement, functioning as a metaphor for the community’s severance from tradition and the land. However, surrogate mother/daughter relationships develop in each novel to ground their daughters, literally grounding them to place, while also strengthening their relationship to the land and raising awareness of their heritage. In these novels, the development of grounding surrogate/adoptive mothers thus becomes the method by which Native American communities reclaim their land and culture. Each novel explores the dual symbolism of motherhood to simultaneously represent cultural disruption and renewal.

## Introduction

To begin, I feel it is important to address my position in relation to these texts. Because Native American identity is often socially and politically at stake in Native American literature, I want to address my interpretive limitations. I do not identify as Native American and I come from a background of cultural and racial privilege. I have also been trained in literary analysis, but not in cultural studies. Therefore, I want to make it clear that I do not speak for Native American communities. I also do not seek to “interpret” their cultures. My interest in the subject comes first from my subjective fascination with these texts and secondly from a desire to understand and study literary conceptions of the world beyond my own experience. This paper is personally important to me in that it gives me the opportunity to explore new ways of thinking about the world, new methods of expression, and the chance to reach beyond my experience to try to understand a culture very different from my own. Although I believe my research has given me insight into certain aspects of Native American cultures, I consciously focus my paper on close literary analysis in order to resist the tendency to make assumptions or generalizations about ways of life that are, in many ways, foreign to me.

However, I don’t want to undermine the importance of my research. I feel that this is a significant research area for two reasons. The first is that the topic of motherhood has been underrepresented in Native American literary criticism, particularly in regards to Linda Hogan’s fiction and, even more specifically, her novel *Power*. Secondly, both these authors use the theme of motherhood to address contemporary cultural Native American concerns regarding land and tradition. According to Michelle R. Kloppenburg, the dramatic changes in social, political, and

natural landscapes that have occurred in the past and continue in the present require Native Americans to balance

[a] sense of identity [that is] based on transpersonal connections to the community, landscape, and myth, as well as on the adherence to traditional indigenous beliefs which advocate a...blending of the past, present, and future.... Each individual must embrace all details of his or her personal history, even the more painful occurrences, to maintain the equilibrium of the three tenses. (28)

I argue that motherhood holds cultural relevance in the novels of Linda Hogan and Louise Erdrich in the way that it becomes a metaphor for the changing social and natural landscapes in the past and present experiences of Native American tribes. It also becomes the means by which Native American tribes seek to regain a balanced sense of personal and communal identity by binding present landscapes and relationships to past traditions and future generations.

In order for motherhood to promote the wholeness of identity that Kloppenburg describes, it must dually represent the “more painful occurrences” as well as “transpersonal connections to community, landscape, and myth.” Essentially, motherhood must be able to function as a symbol for both destruction and renewal. I argue that the genocidal separation of families and the environmental destruction of Mother Earth make motherhood a potent symbol for devastation. At the same time, both Erdrich and Hogan use the cultural and spiritual symbolism of motherhood as a force of creation and reunion, focusing on the centrality of rebirth. I base this approach on Emily Hegarty’s assertion that “maternal deities... govern all types of creation, even the destruction necessary for new creations” (171). I argue that these authors represent the duality of motherhood in cosmic or mythical ways in order to simultaneously embody the fragmentation of their communities and, subsequently, to create a sense of cultural rebirth.

Although motherhood is not routinely associated with destructive forces, the history of imperial colonization that disrupted Native communities and families firmly associates motherhood with the cultural destructions brought on by genocide, ecocide, sociological and economic destruction of tribal systems, and the suppression of spirituality. For example, Hegarty describes genocide as the severance of ancestry: “generations were ripped apart by genocidal history” (166). Severed ancestral ties resulted in fragmented communities and ruptured social systems. Paula Gunn Allen, a reputable female-oriented theorist to whom I will refer throughout my essay, suggests that the “physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy,” or a female-centered culture (*Sacred Hoop* 3). In relation to this concept of “gynocracy,” Kay Givens McGowen denounces the annihilation of the “lost matriarchy,” which she describes as the process of “both the economic trauma and the sociopolitical disruption...work[ing] against matriarchy” (57). In her essay “Decolonizing Native Women,” Lee Marcacle agrees with McGowen that “the original economy was managed by women, the great sociological governesses of the past...it was the uprooting of this matriarchal system that opened the door to inequity, shame, and violence in our world” (32). Notably, Marcacle describes two causes of cultural destruction: the dismantling of the matriarchy and the uprooting of the tribe. These forms of cultural displacement are most often attributed to the removal of Native American communities from their homelands and to the devastation of the natural environment.

Ecocide is particularly relevant to my discussion, because all three novels deal directly with the destruction of the land. *Tracks* confronts the logging industry and government allotment of land. *Power* challenges the endangerment of animal life. *Solar Storms* fights the construction of a damaging hydroelectric dam. *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life* explains how

the dramatic injury of ecocide is amplified in tribal life: “by destroying [balances and relationships that exist in the world and its ecosystems] people destroy alternatives – they make it more and more difficult to adapt to change, to crisis, and to the unexpected. One of the great strengths of Native American sacred ways is their viability or adaptability” (4). The biological mothers in each of these novels have run out of alternatives. Their current lives and futures are consequently constricted: Fleur’s livelihood and sense of identity has been compromised by the loss of her family land, Pauline regulates her behavior and controls her body to an extreme, Omishto’s mother has married a controlling abusive husband, and Hannah has been reduced to a body of scars. I argue that both Erdrich and Hogan create surrogate/adoptive mothers to offer a means of adaptation by repairing community, reinforcing identification with the land, and restoring tribal spirituality.

The suppression of Native American sacred practices precipitated significant cultural destruction: “Educational and other assimilation policies on the part of government agencies were designed to change or destroy the sacred teachings and practices of *The People*” (*Sacred* 151). Vine Deloria suggests that “not until the tribes were divided into factions by the different denominations... did tribal in-fighting begin, based on religious preference” (*Sacred* 158). Hertha Wong agrees with Deloria. She reasons that “the breakdown of tribal social structures is...the result, in part, of a sustained assault on tribal integrity by the United States government” (176). Inasmuch that spirituality constituted tribal life, the eradication of spiritual practices signified a collapse of tribal systems. Jennifer Brice relates this spiritual destruction to a sense of “motherlessness” as extending beyond the immediate biological mother-child relationship. It is “the state of being cut off from the maternal, life-giving force” for both the individual and the tribe (128).

This “maternal, life-giving force” is exactly what constitutes the regenerative power of motherhood, which relies on tribal continuance, relational sense of community and identity, the restoration of the matriarchy, and a spiritual connection to Mother Earth. Wong identifies the role of motherhood in the continuation of the culture: “Native American women long have been associated with the continuance of tribal tradition, both through childbearing and through transmission of cultural values in stories” (174). Vital to the regeneration of culture are these traditional stories, which instill cultural values, practices, and spiritual epistemologies in their listeners. Mothers, as the primary storytellers, sustain individual and cultural life. Emily Hegarty notes that “Native American maternal deities...such as Spider Grandmother and Thought Woman...bring forth life not biologically but through chanting and singing” (171). The maternal conception of individual life originates in stories just as the culture originated from the stories of maternal deities. Through the life-giving energy of stories, the surrogate/adoptive mothers in all three novels assume a maternal role by immersing their adopted daughters in their personal, cultural, and spiritual histories. Consequently, each novel takes part in the oral tradition.

Gretchen M. Bataille describes the connection between the oral tradition and tribal identity: “the properties of the oral tradition derive from a concern for communal welfare, the subordination of the individual to the collective needs of the tribe” (4). In this way, storytelling builds community.

Community is essential to a Native American sense of relational identity. William Bevis suggests that “‘identity,’ for a Native American, is not a matter of finding ‘one’s self,’ but of finding a ‘self’ that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from that transpersonal time and space is to lose identity” (19). Wong brilliantly applies Bevis’s definition of transpersonal identity to an expanded conception of motherhood:

Feeling at home in the traditional sense, [sic] is sensing one’s relationship to one’s social, geographic, and cosmic networks, as well as to one’s immediate and extended family.



Mother is not merely one's biological parent; she is all one's relations (male and female, human and animal, individual and tribal), and she is connected to the earth. (177)

Here, motherhood forms the central framework of tribal community. In all three novels, motherhood likewise encompasses "social, geographic, and cosmic networks," and, in doing so, breaks down the boundaries that isolate their characters, thereby allowing them to develop relational identities, grounded in tradition, community, and landscape.

Landscape is necessary to a relational sense of identity and centered on motherhood. "Native women viewed the Earth as their Mother, who gave life to plants, just as they, the women, gave life to their children" (McGowen 54). Cultural memory is inscribed on the physical landscape, which depends on spiritual conceptions of motherhood. In his book *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and Our World*, Ed McGaa explores the oneness of motherhood, spirituality, and culture as they originate in Mother Earth. Writing from an Oglala Sioux heritage but applying conceptions of motherhood to all Native American experience, he centers motherhood on Mother Earth, saying that "sharing and generosity...formed the basis for [Native American] closeness to the beginning Mother – Mother Earth" (45). Here, motherhood is not only the source for personal identity but also for community, the origin of cultural identity. McGaa describes the tribe's natural and spiritual birth from the Mother Earth: "a natural bonding begins within the misty, generative womb of Mother Earth... [T]he spiritual bond is likened to an attachment to Mother Earth as one sits within her warm womb" (62). Cultural identity is closely interwoven with the spiritual existence of the tribe located in mythical conceptions of earth as mother.

Paula Gunn Allen reflects the essential spirituality of motherhood when she declares that "[w]oman is the sun and the earth; she is grandmother; she is mother; she is Thought, Wisdom, Dream, Reason, Tradition, Memory, Deity, and Life itself" (268). With woman in the center of

community, as Allen's declaration suggests, the matriarchal society could be restored.

Motherhood is central to the social structure and locality of the tribe: "generations of mothers, daughters, and granddaughters formed large social units that made up the clans, as well as individual lineages. The power of matrilineage was reinforced by our matrilineal residence patterns" (McGowen 54). The matriarchy's tie to place thus reflects a grounded tribal system.

I model my definition of "grounding" after William Bevis's conception of "homing" in his essay "Native American Novels: Homing In." For me, the term "grounding" implies a more inclusive sense of homing, by locating home in community, landscape, and heritage. Although I find the term grounding to be more operative for my purposes, I nevertheless support and build upon Bevis's ideas about the function of "homing" in Native American literature in general and in the three novels I focus on in particular. Bevis argues that in contrast to western novels, in which the protagonist leaves home on a journey of discovery, Native American novels are "centripetal, converging, contracting. The hero comes home" (16) and "finds his identity by staying" (18). In this argument I find a strong case for my own conception of "grounding."

Essentially, my definition of the maternal "grounding" boils down to three connotations of the word: to place on the ground, to settle or establish a foundation, and to instruct in elements or principles. In these novels, surrogate and adoptive mothers ground their daughters in three ways:

1. Literally giving children shelter, home, community
2. Strengthening their reciprocal relationship to the land
3. Raising their awareness of their tribal heritage

In contrast, the biological mothers in these novels are "groundless," which means they are displaced from their community, land, and heritage. These mothers then displace their own daughters, most tamely by abandoning or alienating them but more exceptionally by directly

interfering with their daughters' relational sense of grounding, most drastically through abuse or violence.

Both "groundlessness" and "grounding" are visually represented in interesting ways. First, in all three novels a significant storm literally lifts the characters off the ground, simulating groundlessness. In *Tracks* the two biological mothers, Pauline and Fleur, are lifted up into the air by a tornado that rips apart their town. In *Power* an intense hurricane wreaks havoc on the landscape and lifts the daughter protagonist Omishto into the air. In *Solar Storms*, the biological mother Hannah is washed up on shore by a storm and is consistently associated with storm imagery. Even more curiously, in each of these novels, characters hang suspended from a tree as a symbol of their groundlessness. Finally, a uniting representation of groundlessness among all three novels is a memory-erasing trauma experienced by all the biological mothers that disconnects them from their personal past and cultural origins. Images of "grounding" parallel "groundlessness." All three novels use a water trope to evoke the water of the womb. Rivers are described as blood veins, indicating the character's grounded identification with place. Roots, in opposition to the image of suspension in the limbs of a tree, ground characters in family, history, and earth. Finally, gender b(l)ending of motherhood is associated with the adoptive/surrogate mothers. For instance, in *Tracks* Fleur's adoptive grandfather becomes an adoptive maternal figure for Fleur's daughter Lulu. In *Power*, the adoptive/surrogate mother is described in gender-neutral terms and associated with masculinity. In *Solar Storms*, multiple men of the community help to raise protagonist daughter Angel. As I begin my discussion of each book separately, I will delve into the symbolic qualities of these images, as they relate to the duality of motherhood to simultaneously represent destruction and renewal.

**Louise Erdrich**

In *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich tells the story of a displaced community severed from their home, land, and traditions. This estrangement is also experienced on more intimate levels within individual relationships between members of the community. In order to represent the relational struggles within the Chippewa tribe, Erdrich sets up a narrative structure that revolves around relationships and layers of relationships. I argue that at the center of this relational structure lies the mother/daughter relationship between Fleur and Lulu. The distance between mother and daughter grows throughout the plot of the novel as the dominant white culture increasingly invades the Chippewa community. “In a community ravaged by illness, poverty, and white-instituted dependence, familial disconnection is a growing reality” (Hughes 89). The invasion is manifest in Lulu’s white-identification and in Fleur’s progressive detachment from family due to her family’s increasing detachment from the land. In her essay “Adoptive Mothers and Throw-Away Children in the Novels of Louise Erdrich,” Hertha Wong describes Fleur’s struggle to mother Lulu in an alien world. When Fleur sends Lulu to government school, Wong argues that Fleur does not abandon her but rather desperately seeks to “prepare her for life in the Anglo-dominated world: the world that has felled the forests around Fleur’s cabin; the world that has silenced Misshepeshe, the water monster; the world that has turned Chippewa against Chippewa as relatives steal land allotments from one another” (186). Thus, Wong suggests that Fleur’s inability to mother is a direct result of cultural devastation. Fleur is groundless on multiple levels: the government has usurped her family’s land, her relatives have stolen her land, and the developers have destroyed her land. Fleur’s displacement is confirmed when she leaves at the end of the novel. When Fleur sends Lulu to boarding school, Lulu is also displaced and removed from her culture. When she returns, Lulu’s appearance reflects her cultural alienation: “she has

rejected her mother's earthy ways in favor of red lipstick, permed hair, and tall high heels" (Wong 185). Lulu resents Fleur, "the one [she] will not call mother" (*Tracks* 2).

The distance between mother and daughter is crucially represented by the absence of each character from the narrative dialogue in which other characters engage. The chapters alternate between the first person narrative perspectives of Nanapush and Pauline. However, the importance of the mother/daughter relationship is not undermined by the growing distance between Fleur and Lulu. Although their voices are absent from the narration, their relationship is central to the structure of the novel. In her essay "Tongue-Tied: Rhetoric and Relation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," Sheila Hassel Hughes argues that Fleur's story gains relational strength through her narrative absence. She discusses the ways in which language has a relational purpose and function, arguing that in the novel, identity is created and sustained through language; thus, language necessarily relies on community. Because Fleur never speaks her own story, previous readers and critics have asked whether or not Fleur suffers disempowerment because of her "tonguelessness." Gloria Bird links Fleur's lack of voice to the destruction of the land: "the original narrative voice is, like the land itself, being lost, divided, and harvested for other means" (qtd. in Hughes 102). However, Hughes argues that although she has no tongue, Fleur's voice is enhanced in the way that it travels through the mouths of the two alternating narrators, Nanapush and Pauline. Through this style of narration, the duality of motherhood is foregrounded by the juxtaposition of the biological mother Pauline, who rejects all ties to family, and the adoptive grandfather/mother Nanapush, through whose story crucial relational ties of community and identity are strengthened. Thus, Nanapush's narration gains a relational power; through his mouth, Fleur's story grows. Fleur's story gains authority in this manner: it is enhanced and expanded by the greater community outside herself. She gains a mythic presence both within the

community and within the structure of the novel itself. Nanapush relies on this mythic presence. He directs his story to Lulu; his purpose in storytelling is to bridge the gap between mother and daughter. The novel itself becomes a link between mother and daughter.

Nanapush's purpose in storytelling is not only to restore the relationship between mother and daughter but to reconnect Lulu to her culture, to ground her in tribe and tradition, thus ensuring the continuation of cultural tradition in future generations. His stories are part of a female tradition that grew out of cultural necessity: "American Indian women have been a part of the storytelling tradition – both oral and written – from its inception, passing on stories to their children and their children's children and using the word to advance those concepts crucial to cultural survival" (Bataille 102). As Nanapush assumes the role of storyteller, he also takes part in a maternal tradition and adopts a maternal responsibility for the maintenance of cultural values. According to Catherine Rainwater, this cultural survival relies on the power of words to shape and create reality: "Native American philosophy (and the literature informed by it) conveys an inherently semiotic theory of existence" (*Fiery Stars* x). She quotes N. Scott Momaday, who says "names confer being" (qtd. in *Fiery Stars* x). This is certainly true in *Tracks*, when Nanapush names Lulu after his lost daughter. The name itself shapes Lulu's existence by invoking the spirit of Nanapush's dead daughter, foreshadowing Lulu's eventual distance from her home, now lost to Nanapush in a different sense. Additionally, the act of naming shapes Lulu's existence by creating a familial, even maternal, bond between Nanapush and Lulu. Gerald Vizenor's account of Chippewa naming practices reinforces the cultural importance of Nanapush's and Lulu's relationship: "the *niiawee* – the person to whom the life of the child will be dedicated...must in the course of time give the child some name...the *real name* of the *anishinaabe* child is given only by his *niiawee*, which is usually done when the child has

become sick for the first time” (65). In naming Lulu, Nanapush adheres to tradition, fulfills the role of the *niiawee*, and creates an inextricable bond between himself and Lulu. Furthermore, as Nanapush nurses Lulu back to health later in the novel when her life is threatened by frostbite, Nanapush adopts a maternal role, calling Lulu “daughter.” If “daughter” is Lulu’s “real name” according to Vizenor, then Nanapush has granted Lulu a necessarily relational identity.

In narrating her mother’s history, Nanapush relies on the bond between him and Lulu and the power of words to reconnect Lulu to her family, home, and culture. In his assessment of the performative quality of *Tracks*, James Flavin suggests that by performing his story to Lulu, Nanapush promotes the spoken word, which functions as a survival tool and a link between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Specifically, Nanapush relies on the healing power of words. He says “I saved myself by starting a story... I got well by talking” (46). Likewise, he heals Lulu through song: “I did not dare break the string between us, and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking, just as at this moment” (167). In speaking Fleur’s story to Lulu, Nanapush endeavors to heal the relationship between mother and daughter. According to Roma Heillig Morris, words are the most powerful healing tool for restoring damaged relationships and broken ties; they are essential to rebuilding broken communities (99-100). Thus, Nanapush’s efforts to reconnect mother to daughter are part of a larger endeavor to recreate community and restore cultural balance. In rebuilding community Nanapush “reweave[s] connections to the past that might otherwise be lost while giving meaning and hope to the present” (Hughes 92). Nanapush grounds Lulu in her personal and cultural past.

In these ways, Erdrich creates a “semiotic theory of existence” within the narrative of the novel. In more complicated ways, Erdrich creates a similar semiotic basis for the linguistic style and form of her novel. For instance, within the narrative of the novel, Nanapush tells his story to

Lulu, but when he continually speaks in the direct address “Granddaughter, you are the child of the invisible,” the “you” extends beyond the text to include the reader (1). The reader becomes the granddaughter, the child of the invisible, promoting identification with the characters. Specifically, the audience is encouraged to identify with the estranged child Lulu and to adopt Nanapush as a grandfather/mother figure. His healing power of story is thus extended to the audience to create a similar maternal bond that provides the audience (whether Native American or not) with the same familial and cultural history as Lulu. In Momaday’s terms, by “naming” the audience “child,” Erdrich “confers” a Native American sense of “being” on the audience. As Margie Towery observes, “the reader becomes enmeshed in [the characters’] lives” (108).

Erdrich’s creation of an inclusive family reflects the Chippewa emphasis on family as “the basic political and economic unit in the woodland and the primary source of personal identity” (ix). If we turn to traditional Chippewa (also called Ojibwa) stories of origin, we see the relationship between mother/child at the core of Chippewa beliefs. Most versions of the Ojibwa origin stories revolve around the trickster figure Nanabozho. Relevant to my discussion of motherhood is Nanabozho’s birth. According to *Traditional Ojibwa Religion*, Nanabozho’s mother was impregnated by the wind or sun (93). Gerald Vizenor’s account of the story suggests Nanabozho’s mother also gave birth to an animal and a stone (9). In all accounts, she disappeared after giving birth; some versions say she died in childbirth while others say she inexplicably vanished. In all versions, Nanabozho was then raised by his grandmother. According to Vizenor, the trickster left his grandmother to search for his mother on earth (4). This story reveals a few key concepts of the Ojibwa belief in motherhood. First, according to this story motherhood is directly tied to nature, particularly in the way that Nanabozho’s mother was dually impregnated by and gave birth to natural elements. Furthermore, the creation of this world



and of the Chippewa people was a result of Nanabozho's search for his mother on Earth. Thus, the Ojibwa culture was born out of a desire to reconnect child to mother. Finally, the mother's disappearance and the grandmother's adoption suggest a pattern of maternal absence and familial adoption at the heart of mythic motherhood.

*Tracks* generally builds on this pattern to evoke a sense of cultural origin. More specifically, the novel reenacts this story through Nanapush. Many critics have argued that Nanapush embodies the Trickster figure. Relating Nanapush to the Ojibwa version of the trickster character, Catherine M. Catt successfully documents sources for the trickster character in *Tracks*. She describes Nanapush as a sexual adventurer, who has the ability to change, and, most importantly, to defy death. Adding to this discussion, I argue that Nanapush is an ideal adoptive mother for Lulu precisely because of his embodiment of the trickster character. He plays hilarious sexual games with Margaret, who then becomes a caretaker of the family Nanapush has rebuilt. His shape-shifting qualities allow him to cross gender boundaries, to take on a maternal role. The trickster's spiritual role and connection to tradition directly connects Nanapush to the essential culture. Furthermore, according to Ojibwa stories, the trickster is responsible for the origin of the culture. Nanapush is then symbolically related to this cultural birth. From this perspective, his adoption of both Fleur and Lulu and his efforts to unite them imply a cultural rebirth.

Both Hertha Wong and Sheila Hassel Hughes note that it is Nanapush who mothers most consistently throughout the novel. He saves both Fleur and Lulu, nurses them back to health, and adopts them as his daughters. Most significantly, as he cares for Lulu, he reflects on his own relationship to motherhood:

Many times in my life, as my children were born, I wondered what it was like to be a woman, able to invent a human from the extra materials of her own body. In the terrible

times, the evils I do not speak of, when the earth swallowed back all it had given me to love, I gave birth in loss. I was like a woman in my suffering, but my children were all delivered into death. It was contrary, backward, but now I had a chance to put things into a proper order. (167)

Hughes interprets this passage as representative of the mother who “appears here as a creative artist and conscious survivalist, wisely ensuring continuance through the cyclical reimagining and reuse of her own substance” (95). In line with my own argument, Hughes observes an essential adaptive quality to motherhood, in her “reimagining and reuse.” Motherhood is a compelling representation of cultural regeneration, ensuring, as Hughes notes, the “continuance” of the culture. In this passage we see the duality of motherhood, as it represents loss, a recovery from that loss, and hope in renewal. In his loss, Nanapush identifies with the suffering of women who have miscarried. Crucially, this passage occurs simultaneously with Fleur’s own miscarriage. Nanapush identifies with Fleur’s loss and delivers Fleur’s daughter from harm at the very moment that Fleur is defeated by the loss of her second baby. Curiously though, Nanapush doesn’t say “I gave birth *to* loss.” Instead he makes the distinction: “I gave birth *in* loss,” which suggests that it was exactly his loss of family and Fleur’s loss of her child that prompted him to identify with mothers and to adopt a maternal role, channeling maternal energy in order to recreate family. Although Nanapush doesn’t physically give birth, he sings life back into Lulu, delivering her from death, thus becoming Paula Gunn Allen’s “creatix,” a power that emphasizes “she who thinks into being” rather than “she who bears” (*Sacred Hoop* 15). Crucially, Allen’s definition of “creatix” includes both men and women, thus emphasizing a “creative maternal approach to communal reproduction” (Hughes 96). Nanapush’s adoption of a maternal role signifies a gender-neutral tribal responsibility for identity and community, with motherhood as the central unifying force.

Hughes contrasts Nanapush's embrace of motherhood with Pauline's rejection of motherhood by comparing their respective associations with water imagery. As Nanapush nurses Lulu back to health, the amniotic language of the scene is filled with watery images of rebirth and regeneration. Hughes contrasts this passage to Pauline, who "rejects all of the watery aspects of her Indian heritage" (93), including the natural functions of her own body as well as her femininity, which incorporates both her sexuality (as represented by her murder of Napoleon, the father of the child she desperately tries to abort) and her motherhood (in the rejection of her only child Marie). The reason for Pauline's eventual spiral into insanity, Hughes argues, is her non-relational language. She is severed from a sense of interpersonal identity. As Pauline is about to bear her child, she thinks, "If I gave birth, I would be lonelier. I saw, and I saw too well. I would be an outcast, a thing set aside for God's use, a human who could be touched by no other human" (135). This passage reflects Pauline's inward focus. For her, motherhood is inverted. Instead of representing connection and community, even family at its most basic level, she believes motherhood will bring isolation.

In contrast to Nanapush's acceptance of maternal identity and his use of the power of motherhood to reconstruct community, why does Pauline reject motherhood as a feared incentive for alienation? In contrast to Fleur, who gave up Lulu as an act of mercy, why does Pauline so violently reject and selfishly abandon her daughter? Wong suggests that "Pauline's rejection of her child is simply a continuation of her self-rejection, brought on, in great measure, by her mixed-blood status and her cultural alienation" (184). I agree with Wong although she doesn't pursue this line of thought any further. I think it's important to explore the reasons for Pauline's rejection of motherhood and the implications of Wong's assertion, in order to understand how motherhood is represented in the novel.

In his essay "Fragmentation of a Tribal People in Erdrich's *Tracks*," Sidner Larson explains how people of mixed-blood were often politically exploited, and, if not perceived as dangerous to the tribe, they were, at least, marginalized. In the case of the Mojave Indians, the tribe believed that mixed-blood people carried a "foreign illness" that could cause death. "As a result, mixed-blood infants were sometimes killed, or if they were permitted to survive, their fate was harsh: they were rejected by their maternal kin and shunned by the rest of the tribe" (4). According to Larson, the cultural alienation of mixed-blood people is due to the mother's "harsh" rejection. From this context, Pauline's rejection of her child may be viewed as a projection of the cultural rejection of mixed-blood people by their "maternal kin." Even if Larson's account is more exaggerated than the treatment of mixed-blood people in *Tracks*, Pauline certainly feels persecuted to an extreme. At first her mixed-blood status makes her invisible to others, then singled out and attacked by Nanapush, rejected by Fleur, and finally, victimized by the Devil himself. From the very beginning, Pauline seeks to eradicate any affiliation with her Indian identity in order to erase her mixed-blood status when she leaves her family in pursuit of a white identity, saying "'I was made for better'" (14). Pauline has no tie to family and hardly expresses concern when she learns that her family may have been killed by disease. Her cultural isolation escalates throughout the novel as she renounces her adopted family name, saying "I got quit of those Morisseys!" (142), and purges herself of her Indian identity, saying "I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). By the end of the novel, she no longer identifies as Pauline, but renames herself "Sister Leopolda" (205). Pauline's rejection of her Indian blood extends to her daughter Marie who is visible evidence of Pauline's tribal lineage and her relationship with Napoleon Morissey.

Napoleon Morissey is the only man to ever touch Pauline and in many ways, he personifies Pauline's rejection of her cultural heritage in favor of a Catholic lifestyle. When Pauline first meets Napoleon, his alcoholism represents a side of modern tribal life that Pauline despises. "He put the belly of the jar to my cheek, rolled it back and forth, laughing at me standing so rigid and afraid" (65). Here, Napoleon exposes Pauline's fears, just as he does when they later have sex. She fears no one else would have her. She fears his rejection. He exposes her deficiencies and self-hatred: "I hadn't liked seeing myself naked, plucked and skinned" (74). Here, literally and figuratively stripped down to her essential self, Pauline describes herself as violently diminished. Marie becomes evidence of this self-degradation: "[Marie] was soiled, formed by me, bearing every defilement I had known by Napoleon Morissey" (136). Marie is a physical manifestation of Napoleon's debasement and Pauline's corruption. Napoleon becomes a symbol of corruption to such an extent that by the end of the novel, Pauline thinks that she is fighting Misshepesu as she strangles Napoleon on the banks of Lake Matchimanito. Believing herself to be on a saintly mission, she rejects the satanic power of Misshepesu/Napoleon, and thereby conquers evil and purges the tribe of their wicked fabrications.

Pauline's transformation, culminating in "Sister Leopolda," reflects her obsessive adherence to her own distorted version of Catholicism. Through Pauline, Erdrich doesn't demonize Catholicism but rather critiques the misinterpretation or abuse of religious devotion through Pauline's destructive obsessions. Not only is Pauline self-destructive, but her fixations contribute to her rejection of her daughter: "since I had already betrothed myself to God, I tried to force it out of me, to punish, to drive it from my womb" (131). In this moment, Pauline's desire to abort her daughter is an act of self-punishment for betraying God. We see an instinctual objectification of her child as something apart from herself, an "it." Even after she names her

daughter “Marie” after the Virgin, she still struggles to recognize her as human: “it grew, or *she* grew” (133). When Pauline is in labor, she decides “to die, and let the child too, no taint of original sin on her unless she breathed air” (135). Significantly, here, Pauline’s first concern is herself; she includes Marie almost as an afterthought. Under the guise of self-sacrifice for her daughter’s soul, Pauline seeks self-destruction. Finally, Pauline’s distorted perception of Catholicism is exposed when she is visited on a “night of deepest cold” by a vision of an ambiguous Satan/Christ figure who tells her she “was forgiven of [her] daughter. [She] should forget her” (137). Pauline can no longer distinguish between the Savior and the Devil. The ties between Pauline and Marie are severed; her warped vision prompts the final rupture between her and her child. Crucially, this rupture happens in memory. Whereas Lulu has forgotten the ways of her mother Fleur, here the mother forgets the child, a reverse and final form of cultural forgetting. Pauline’s memory is not culturally grounded. Instead, she learns “where [she’s] from” from her ambiguous visitor, who sits above her to “look down at [her]” (137). Here, Pauline misplaces her identity, past, and sense of place on an indistinct figure, visually separated from the ground, and representatively displaced.

Throughout the novel, Pauline is literally and figuratively displaced. At two significant points, she is physically lifted off the ground. The first instance occurs when a tornado hits the town of Argus and literally turns it upside down:

I pitched head over heels along the dirt drive.... The sky was cluttered. A herd of cattle flew through the air like giant birds.... A candle, still lighted, blew past...the sow from behind the lockers, on the run, her hooves a blur, set free, swooping, diving screaming as everything in Argus fell apart and got turned upside down, smashed and thoroughly wrecked. (28)

This storm disturbs Pauline. It literally disrupts and symbolically inverts her world. Objects that are normally familiar to Pauline are made alien by their dislocation. The destruction of the storm

lies in its displacement of the town. Argus becomes groundless, and as a result “everything” is destroyed, including Pauline. Most importantly, in Pauline’s desperate attempt to save herself from being lifted by the storm, she takes hold of the iron bar that locks the meat freezer. She later learns that in doing so, she locked the three men that she had earlier observed “raping” Fleur (I put “raping” in quotations not to invalidate the rape but to point out that it’s never made clear if the rape actually happened) in the freezer, and they all froze to death. “Sometimes, thinking back, I see my arms lift, my hands grasp, see myself dropping the beam into the metal grip. At other times, that moment is erased” (27). Here, the storm comes to represent a gap in memory. Pauline’s history is displaced. After the storm, she no longer has a place in Argus and must leave.

This moment marks a change in Pauline. The storm haunts her. She relives the moment of grabbing the beam in her dreams, recognizable as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. At this moment she begins to seek redemption. She finds it in the death of Mary Pepewas, “alone in [her] presence, a girl of about my age” (66). Even as Pauline feels separated from Mary, she identifies with her. As she watches her die, Pauline feels

as though [she’d] been cut free as well.... And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and [she] rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below.... When they found me in the tree later that morning, everyone was shot with fear at the way [she] hung, precarious, above the ground. (68)

At this moment Pauline experiences groundlessness as the inverse of traditional relationships with place. As Paula Gunn Allen describes, “The Earth is; in a very real sense, the same as ourself” (Iyani 192). Robert M. Nelson articulates what Allen means when she says “ourself”: “the possibility of individual identity not only with the land but with the cultural traditions grounded there” (133). From within these traditional contexts, Pauline’s groundlessness signifies

a loss of identity because she is disconnected from the land and from her culture. Nelson observes that the process of “self-verification in terms of place brings the individual into identity also with the life of the People, whose collective traditions have evolved out of (and are verified by) a similar process” (133-134). Pauline’s failure to find identity in the land as a result of her disturbing groundlessness is also her failure to find a relational sense of identity, a place within the community. Pauline has no maternal bond with Marie because her separation from the land (both literal and symbolic) prevents her from cultivating any significant relationships. Thus, she envisions herself isolated by her groundlessness: “I alone, watching, filled with breath, knew death as a form of grace” (68). Death is the ultimate loss of self. If death is a form of grace for Pauline, it follows that she would seek grace by trying to kill herself and her daughter as an act of redemption for her disgusting “grounded” (74) relationship with Napoleon.

### **Linda Hogan**

Motherhood is also a recurring theme in Linda Hogan’s writing. I will establish a pattern of regenerative motherhood in Hogan’s essays and poetry in order to demonstrate how Hogan repeatedly uses motherhood as a metaphor for the damaged social and natural landscapes in the past and present experiences of Native American people, as well as the creative and spiritual hope for future generations. This preoccupation of Hogan’s is then extended and explored in her fiction, most poignantly in her novels *Solar Storms* and *Power*, in which the duality of motherhood as a symbol of both destruction and renewal is represented in the novels’ multiple mother/daughter relationships. Through the unifying power of motherhood, Hogan’s characters seek to regain a balanced sense of personal and communal identity.



Central to Hogan's conception of motherhood is, as Jennifer Brice describes, her propensity for "anthropomorphizing the land and landscaping the human body" (128). This rhetorical device pervades Hogan's collection of essays entitled *Dwellings*. Most notably we see a connection between the female body, the act of conception and birth, and a Native American's personal connection to the natural and spiritual world in her essay "The Caves": "[Caves] are a feminine world, a womb of earth, a germinal place of brooding. In many creation stories, caves are the places that bring forth life" (*Dwellings* 31). Here, the landscape is maternal. The cave's maternal qualities, its physical properties and cultural meanings, give the place spiritual regenerative energy. Hogan envisions a dream:

I passed through a doorway that was a gaping mouth, guarded by a skull. Light shone out from the eyes of that skull. Inside the cavern was warm, steaming water and chambers where women were working, sewing together bodies, stitching legs and arms, making life. I was there, in that dream, searching for my mothers: the earth, my human mother, my own life as a woman. (32)

The imagery of this passage illustrates Hogan's dual representation of motherhood. As Hogan enters the cave, she faces a skull, an image of death. And yet, this skull doesn't deter her; it guards the entrance, protects the cave, and even lights Hogan's way. Symbolically, death is natural and necessary for rebirth and regeneration. Appropriately, the process of "making life" is a process of re-making. It involves the work of piecing together body parts, reuniting what has been separated. This image parallels a passage from *Solar Storms* in which Angel, the narrator, "dreamed of a woman in a white-walled cave sewing together pieces of humans, an arm to a trunk, a foot to a leg" (86). In the novel, this dream describes Angel's adopted mother, Bush, who literally pieces together the bodies of animals and figuratively pieces together Angel's past. In both the novel and the essay, the reparative work of mothers represents both separation and reunion. Significantly, Hogan searches for many mothers: her cultural Mother Earth, her

biological mother, as well as her own identity. She must journey inside the womb-like cave, into the ground, to reconnect to her mother, her culture, and herself.

Hogan's interest in this reparative process and the regenerative Mother Earth are also evident in her poetry. Throughout Linda Hogan's poetry collection, *The Book of Medicines*, for example, the duality of motherhood is essential to developing a united personal and cultural identity. For example, her poem "Partings" dramatizes a people's separation from Mother Earth in the context of a mother/daughter relationship. Hogan describes the separation between mother and daughter in the planetary metaphor of the moon separated from earth: "a daughter whose leaving broke land to pieces" (71). In this image, maternal separation is manifest in natural destruction. The separation between mother and daughter has the same cosmic force as the ancient separation of the moon from the earth, leaving behind it "a scar of rupture" (71). A similar metaphor is used in *Solar Storms*: "I remembered what Husk had once said about the creation of the moon, how it split off from earth, leaving an ocean behind, salt tears. The moon left the body of its mother, both of them knowing there would be no return" (326). The moon's spatial distance from earth, a metaphor for the people's physical and spiritual distance from their Mother Earth and their land of inheritance, is similarly destructive. Linda Hogan and Native American people who now live in the modern world face the additional temporal separation from the traditional presence of Mother Earth. Thus, Hogan says: "This is what it means to be mother and child, / to wear the skin of ancestors, / the mother's stolen lands / carried on the face of another" (*Book of Medicines* 71). Although distanced from the earth in time, space, and tradition, Native American people living in today's modern world still carry the marks of that loss, just as the moon's craters resemble the crater scars left behind on earth. Similarly, the earth still responds to the actions of the distanced moon in the pull and sway of the tides. Hogan does not

call for a return to a pristine earth, or a return to the beginning, but instead a continuation onward: “life knows where it is going / so does water, / so does blood” (72). Motherhood is represented here by the “water” of birth and the “blood” tie of family, as well as the blood shed in painful partings. Motherhood thus dually represents the painful history of the people as well as the (re)generative power of their culture.

Despite Hogan’s preoccupation with motherhood and its clear centrality in her work, few critics have acknowledged its unifying presence in her writing. The literary criticism on *Power*, for example, is very limited. The majority of criticism asks to what extent the novel critiques Christianity. Arguably the most influential piece of criticism is Michael Hardin’s essay “Standing Naked Before the Storm: Linda Hogan’s *Power* and the Critique of Apocalyptic Narrative,” in which he argues that Hogan “openly confront[s] and subvert[s] the apocalyptic nature of the Europeans,” ultimately concluding that Hogan invalidates the Christian myth (136). Whereas many scholars engage in conversation with Hardin’s essay, I depart from the critical emphasis on Christianity in my own analysis to discuss the complex maternal figures in the novel. I acknowledge that Hardin’s work makes a significant contribution to the critical discussion of *Power*. However, his essay, and the body of criticism that engages with his essay, fails to explore the role of motherhood as the primary grounding force that unites the protagonist with her tribal heritage. I lay the foundations for further study in a close reading of the text. In order to do so, I’ll model my discussion after the structure of the novel by following the daughter Omishto through her grounding journey, instead of focusing on the biological and adoptive mothers, as I did in *Tracks*.

*Power*, narrated by the young protagonist Omishto, tells the story of Omishto’s journey of self-discovery as she navigates the difficult transition into adulthood and develops a sense of

identity grounded in the natural world and in tribal community. In the aftermath of an ominous and destructive hurricane, Omishto accompanies her adoptive mother, Aunt Ama, as she hunts and kills an emaciated panther, revered as a sacred ancestor of the Taiga people and deemed endangered by the dominant culture. Omishto's witness of this act has profound consequences for Omishto and her community. As Ama is tried by white society and judged according to tribal law, Omishto struggles to find her place in two worlds. As she attempts to understand the mystery of Ama's actions and reconcile her own sense of right and wrong, Omishto is torn between her surrogate tribal mother, Ama, who grounds Omishto in a spiritual natural way of knowing the world, and her Westernized mother, who wants her to abandon tribal tradition in favor of Christianity. By the end of the novel Omishto reaches an integrated, if tentative, sense of identity.

The novel immediately positions Omishto in a state of groundlessness in the very first sentence: "This is the place where clouds are born and I am floating" (1). Omishto appears suspended in space, evoking a sense of floating in the womb. She lies in the fetal position swaying in her boat. This prenatal imagery anticipates the birth process, foreshadows the formation of Omishto's identity, and "prefigures the alternative world that Omishto, and her mentor Ama Eaton, will share" (Baria 68). At this point in the narrative, Omishto is displaced; she has no sense of home. She feels uneasy about her family's white-identified lifestyle, but she is still uncomfortable in Ama's home. Her displacement indicates a transition marked by her liminality: "Two worlds exist. Maybe it's always been this way, but I enter them both like I am two people" (97). Omishto envisions a divided world in which her own identity is split. She is torn between her loyalties to her biological family and her tribal community. Her displacement is accentuated by the devastation of the landscape: "[the water] is polluted like all this land and you

can't even drink a cupful of that thin trickle of bad water" (5). The same water imagery that signifies birth also describes contamination.

Appropriately, the relationship between mother and daughter is contaminated by fear. Omishto remembers that even as a baby "Mama turned her back to [her]" (4). Significantly, Mama remains unnamed throughout the novel, while Omishto's name means the "One Who Watches" (4). Whereas Omishto's name immediately identifies her tribal affinity and heralds her growing ability to see the multilayered relationship between natural and tribal worlds, the absence of Mama's name calls attention to her displacement and disempowerment. Mama's suspicion of Omishto's inherent tribal epistemology escalates throughout the novel and prevents Omishto from channeling her power to see. For example, Mama disapproves of Omishto: "My mom says it's not good to sleep in my boat and I shouldn't camp out like that, but it's the safest place there is, surrounded all around by water" (7). Especially in the way that this water symbolizes Omishto's amniotic existence, Mama's incursion emphasizes the distance between mother and daughter. She cannot provide the same maternal safety that Omishto experiences on her boat, surrounded by the soothing waters of the lake. Omishto and her mother are so distanced from each other that Omishto's existence represents a gap in her mother's memory: "My mother doesn't remember my birth so she can't tell me anything about it and sometimes, anyway, I feel as if I am not yet born, not really" (109). Her mother's amnesia erases Omishto's personal history; she has no origin. Here, we see Omishto recognize that the development of her new grounded identity is a process of rebirth. Yet this process does not bring her closer to her biological mother. After her journey with Ama, Omishto returns home to find that she is alienated from her mother's life: "I look around my mother's house and nothing is familiar. It's as if I have never lived here. I see the world this place has come from. I see the walls of the

fallen forest, the floor of clay dissolving in time” (91). Omishto’s presence has been erased from the house. Her relationship with her mother is replaced with her relationship to the land, which extends beyond her personal origins to encompass the origins of an older world. By the end of the novel, Omishto is so distanced from her mother that she says, “I don’t even know her” (220).

In contrast to Mama, “Aunt” Ama Eaton encourages Omishto to expand her understanding of the world: “This place is Ama’s love.... It’s my love, too, this place of million-year-old rivers and sloughs and jagged limestone, and I’m just barely getting to know it, learning from Ama, and how the underground rivers run” (8). Ama passes on an ancient love for place, specifically grounded in “underground rivers.” Omishto observes that the house “seems to lean against the plants and trees” (7), thus establishing Ama’s home as a place of grounding. Omishto prefers this environment to the sterility of her home life: “I think how my mama once called [Ama] a human ruin, but it’s just that she doesn’t fit into mama’s idea of what a woman should be. For me, out of those two choices, I prefer the ruin” (9). Ama expands Omishto’s conception of femininity beyond her mother’s restricting and conventional views. Although Omishto adopts her mother’s opposition between order and ruin, her preference for “ruin” emphasizes her identification with Ama, recognizing that Ama also inhabits a liminal space between worlds. Ama accesses the old world and mentors Omishto through stories: “She tells stories... ‘Before the making, the great storm. Before the human people entered this world, there was the great cat, Sisa’” (15). Here, Ama’s stories foreshadow the coming events of the novel. A great storm devastates Omishto’s world, only to allow for Omishto to be re-made. The great cat, Sisa, dies in order for the human people to enter the world. Ama’s revealing story of the origin of her people depicts the destruction necessary for regeneration.

The storm serves as an impetus for Omishto's journey of self-discovery. Amy Greenwood Baria describes the storm in terms of oppositions: "The storm severs contact with civilization, blocking roads and disabling power lines. Omishto's isolation with Ama in the woods sets up the conflict of the novel by emphasizing its duality: the older, natural world and the outside, civilized world" (68). The storm exposes and widens the divisions in Omishto's own identity. The primary tensions of the novel are revealed as the hurricane destroys the town, devastates the landscape, and physically lifts Omishto into the air despite her efforts to ground herself: "My nails claw at the ground, holding to the thin near-roots of grasses, but it feels like I could be blown away from the earth just like the ants and the beetles. Even flat on my stomach on the ground I could be blown off earth clear up to the black holes and burning stars in the sky" (35). In this central scene, the storm threatens Omishto with groundlessness. In defense, she desperately "claws" at the ground but can only find "thin near-roots of grasses." The landscape has been so devastated that Omishto can't find anything to ground herself. Her groundlessness threatens her life with a cosmic force. She describes her fear of the "black holes" and "burning stars" of a dangerous universe. As a reflection of her groundlessness, Omishto sees "a woman hanging in one of the trees that somehow still stands, and I can't even scream when I see her. Then I see it's only a dress in the tree, no body inside it, and I breathe again. Like the ground and the trees, I am relieved" (38). Omishto's error in mistaking the dress for a woman's dangling body underscores the storm's horror. Omishto's loss of breath, earlier described as a life-giving "spirit" (4), again emphasizes the destructive power of the storm. And yet, here we see Omishto beginning to identify with the land. She positions herself as secondary to "the ground and the trees" and imbues them with emotion. This moment of identification occurs at the same time that Omishto realizes that the dress is hers and she is stripped naked. The dress, as a reflection of

Omishito's previous groundless self, remains in the tree, allowing Omishito to now pursue a grounded identity with one less boundary between her and the natural world. In her essay "Encounters across Time and Space: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Political in Linda Hogan's *Power*," Yonka Krasteva argues that the hurricane "represents symbolically the painful process of being (re)born" (211). However, what does it mean to suggest that personal and cultural rebirth is a process of uprooting? In contrast to Krasteva's interpretation, I propose that the novel details a process of rebirth from the destruction of the storm. The storm does not symbolize the moment of rebirth but the destruction necessary for regeneration.

In this respect, the image of the ancient tree Methuselah serves as a symbol for natural and cultural destruction.

[N]ear Ama's house, I can just see the tree that everyone calls Methuselah. They call it that because it's been there so long with its tangled dark roots hanging on five hundred years or so. They say it's a tree the Spanish brought home with them here and planted. It's not from this continent. That's why there's only one. And no one can figure out how it took hold in the shallow soil of this place. (6)

This tree is symbolically significant for a number of reasons. The reference to Methuselah, the oldest living Biblical figure, and the tree's Spanish origins aligns it with the dominant (and dominating) culture. And yet, Methuselah is supplanted. Despite its displacement, the tree is integrated into the environment, becoming a symbol of cultural adaptation. The tree is foreign, and thus isolated, as the only one of its kind. However, its longevity highlights its continual survival. In these ways, the tree's displacement, adaptation, and resistant survival, also symbolizes native cultures. It comes to represent a unification of cultural traditions. As the storm approaches, Omishito notices "the roots of Methuselah, gnarled like hands grasping mightily at something, like old, old hands, hanging onto the earth" (30). In Hogan's personification of the tree, she infuses it with a human desire for a grounded relationship with the earth. In



demonstrating the interconnected relationship between humanity and the natural world, she makes the issue of Methuselah's grounding a human issue. When the storm hits, Omishto struggles to ground herself: "I think I'll be safe if only I can get back to the roots of Methuselah, who has lived through all of these centuries of storm" (34). She doesn't make it in time, however, and as a last effort she cries

"God!" calling out to what has never heard me before, because through the dark air of storm, Methuselah falls and I hear nothing but only see that what has lasted this long is being taken down now as if it were nothing, as if it had never been anything that counted...I know old Methuselah lays there black and uprooted from the hole in the ground where it once was held. (37-38)

In this passage, Omishto's despair is evident in her invocation of a god that she doesn't believe in. In Methuselah's uprooting, his history is erased, leaving behind a scar in the landscape, a marker of its absence. Thus, as the storm uproots Methuselah, groundlessness is represented as the destruction of history and landscape.

After the storm, Omishto undergoes a transformative process under the direction of her adopted mother Ama. "I used to wish she was my mother. I used to ask her, 'Ama, can I live with you?' She'd laugh and say, 'I'm your outside mother. The other one is your inside mother'" (160). As Omishto's "outside" mother, Ama grounds Omishto by exemplifying interconnectedness with the environment. Under Ama's mentorship, Omishto begins to recognize her familial relationship with the panther: "In the old way, [Ama] says, the cat is her relative. My relative, too, since we are in the same clan" (3). Omishto's tie to the panther is strengthened through her bond with Ama. As Ama begins to call to the panther, saying "'Old Grandmother, I am coming'" (49), Omishto, too, develops that relationship. As Omishto begins to recognize Ama and the panther as one and the same, she concludes that in killing the panther, Ama has sacrificed herself: "'You have killed yourself, Ama'" (67). For Omishto, the

recognition that Ama and the panther inhabit the same identity and destiny means that the panther is also her mother (80). Omishto is reborn as the panther's daughter. The growing maternal relationship between Omishto and Sisa the panther becomes solidified when Omishto begins to hear and listen to the panther's stories. The panther fulfills her maternal role as she tells the story of their history, the land, and her culture. Omishto's relational identity expands, her tribal awareness grows, and her sense of community becomes rooted in the land. Baria links this relationship with the panther to Omishto's growing empathy for her people: "Omishto's judgment of Ama signals her awakening to the sanctity of the natural world, but it marks the end of her complacency with the plight of her people. When Omishto recognizes the tragedy of the great cat, so diminished in numbers, she sees the tragedy of the Taiga more clearly than ever before" (70). The panther's role as an adoptive mother in this novel breaks down boundaries of place and identity. Omishto envisions the panther as "a place and it holds [Ama], as if they've always known and lived inside one another" (67). Thus, the panther grounds Omishto in a more comprehensive consciousness of the reciprocal relationships between place, self, and community.

The "two worlds" that symbolized Omishto's division at the beginning of the novel slowly evolve into a more holistic sense of identity throughout the novel. As Omishto follows Ama on her journey to sacrifice the panther, Omishto becomes conscious of multiple levels of being: "We are surrounded by matter, but time disappears from us. Or maybe, as Ama says, there are other worlds beside us all the time and every now and then we cross over and enter one, and every so often, too, one passes over and enters ours" (55). Here, Omishto's senses are heightened; she is in tune with Ama and perceives a fluid world encircling her. Ama teaches Omishto to "read the ground" (176). As a result, we see a dramatic change in Omishto's

description of landscape at the end of the novel as notably grounded. First, Omishto is grounded in the sense that she focuses on the land's deep space and deep time: "Through the ground, through the heavy pull of gravity, I feel the deep underground waters, all of it beneath the hot, bright sun and fresh odor of this sun-warmed world, and I am sinking" (156). She also reinvents herself in the land: "Maybe, like the land, there are rivers, mazes of canals, and swamps that run through my blood" (207). In this passage we see a repetition of the water imagery, this time internalized as a life-giving force. Hogan reciprocally "anthropomorphiz[es] the landscape and landscap[es] her body" (Brice 128). In seeing herself reflected in the landscape, Omishto is able to recognize the land's perpetual movement and regeneration: "Then I remain sitting outside by the place I dug, looking at the exposed root ends of plants, and I feel the cool air come up from the earth. Beneath me are many underground rivers... There is strength inside the earth, movement, turning over" (220). Even if, as some critics have argued, Omishto's identity is not yet whole at the end of the novel, she recognizes the regenerative power of the land, and thus, her own regenerative possibilities.

In *Power*, Omishto comes to represent her people's hope: "I'm both a Taiga, a person from this downtrodden place, and I am the smart daughter, the one they think will show all the others how we can make it" (100-101). Here, Omishto's role as the daughter of her tribe dually connects her to her people's devastated past as well as positions her as a sign of her culture's continuance. Similarly, in *Solar Storms*, Angel reminds her tribe of the horrific abuse of her mother Hannah and then comes to represent the hope of her community as evidence of the possibility of survival in spite of abuse. Whereas Omishto has one primary adoptive mother who connects her to her tribe, Angel's tribal community is composed of a web of grandmothers. In this way, motherhood figures more prominently in *Solar Storms*.

However, the critical scholarship on *Solar Storms* concentrates primarily on landscape. In contrast to the mythical regenerative power of land in interpretations espoused by *Power's* critics, critics of *Solar Storms* offer a more politicized view. Three critics in particular discuss the politics of landscape in the novel, only referring to motherhood as it fits into the political aims of the story. Laura Virginia Castor argues that Hogan creates empathy for the land, which she calls a "politicized strategy" that serves to unite her readers under a common perspective and to influence "her reader's attitudes and understanding of the ways in which indigenous people's rights are connected to the survival of the planet" (159). Castor is only concerned with motherhood as it creates empathy. Barbara Cook similarly focuses on Hogan's *Solar Storms* as a political "environmental novel," "making visible the interrelationship of humanity and the natural world" (36). According to Cook, environmental justice is Hogan's primary concern. The historical context of the novel, the growing communal identity of her characters, and their identification with the land all serve to "increase awareness of ecological politics ... and to effect transformative social change" (50). In contrast to Cook's assertion that the novel is "not a strictly ecofeminist text" (46), Silvia Schultermandl reads the novel from an ecofeminist perspective. She argues that the novel has ecofeminist aims in its challenge of "phallogentric culture dominating women, ethnic minorities, and nonhuman nature" (74). Although Schultermandl does discuss the primary mother/daughter relationship in the novel, she does so only as the relationship represents and then "opposes the domination of Euro-American patriarchy" (81). What Schultermandl misses, and what these three critics fail to recognize as a whole, is the central role of motherhood in the politics of the novel. Although these critics make valid and important arguments, they all fail to acknowledge the unifying force of motherhood that grounds

individual, communal, cultural, and political concerns in the landscape as inseparable from each other.

*Solar Storms* recounts the journey of Angel, a scarred young woman who returns to her place of cultural heritage in order to unearth the truth about her generational and personal history. Angel is motivated by a search for her mother, Hannah, who abandoned her as a child and whose own physical, emotional, and psychological disfigurement, the origins of which are never fully explained in the novel, may reveal the story behind Angel's scarred face. Angel's journey northward reunites her with her grandmothers Dora-Rouge, Agnes, and Bush, a community of women who lead the fight against the construction of a hydroelectric dam that threatens to destroy their tribal land and community. These grandmothers adopt Angel and ground her, providing her with a home and community, a personal and cultural history, and a growing identification with the land. This sense of grounding allows Angel to connect with her mother, Hannah, to cultivate a relational awareness of self, to fight for the land of her heritage, and, crucially, to adopt her half-sister, Aurora, who becomes the unifying hope of the community. Angel's acceptance of a maternal role signifies the completion of her journey.

At the start of the novel, Angel is distanced from her biological mother, Hannah. In many ways, Hannah Wing resembles the character of Fleur Pillager in *Tracks*. Both women lack a personal history. Although we know both women have suffered traumatic abuse of some kind, in each case, we never hear the story of the trauma. Their stories are told through the voices of others. Like the dual-narration in *Tracks*, *Solar Storms* alternates between Angel's narrative voice and stories told by the three grandmothers (presented in italics). Roseanne Hoefel describes the structure of the novel in this way: "Each of the foremothers...offers a narrative of her own formation.... These culture-bearers gradually come together in Angel's mind as she

incrementally pieces herself together via an internal narrative” (33). Angel learns of her mother through the stories told her by Dora-Rouge, Agnes, and Bush, just as Lulu learns of her mother’s story through Nanapush. Like Fleur, Hannah gains a mythical status in the community and in the novel itself in the way that her story passes through the voices of others. Laura Virginia Castor suggests that Hannah is represented as myth: the local community fills in the gaps of her story with the legend of a woman who survived starvation by turning to cannibalism, transforming Hannah into a reenactment of the Cree and Ojibwe *windigo*, a creature that “emerges when a human being indulges self-interest to the point where his or her cravings for food or sex develop into a physical disorder” (169). Through these myths, the community makes sense of the holes in Hannah’s history, her impossible survival, and disturbing abuse. Similarly, the community in *Tracks* explains their fear of Fleur’s unknown history and impossible survival by turning her into the mistress of Misshepesu, the lake’s water demon. Pauline even accuses her of living “in shame with... windigos” (31). These parallels raise the question: Why do both authors represent motherhood in such similar terms?

As I have argued, a disrupted maternal relationship severs the child’s relationship to his/her people. Appropriately then, both Fleur and Hannah have no personal history, and their children are therefore disconnected from their family’s tribal past, just as the community is threatened by a loss of its collective history. Additionally, for both Fleur and Hannah, their personal histories have been erased by trauma, just as their communities’ histories have been erased by disease and the abuse of the land, by devastating genocide and ecocide. The destruction of the community is manifest in the destruction of maternal relationships. Both these women suffer cultural alienation and abuse, making motherhood impossible. In contrast to Paula Gunn Allen’s description of the sacrificial way of the mother (*Grandmothers* 11), these women

are described as windigos, creatures of self-indulgence, the very opposite of motherhood. However, this is where Fleur and Hannah begin to differ. Although Fleur certainly loses her ability to mother, she does not fulfill the myth of the windigo. Pauline describes her in those terms, and Pauline's narration is certainly unreliable, especially because she rejects her own child, Marie. Although devastated by the loss of her land and the disruption of her community, Fleur retains her integrity and gives up Lulu as an act of mercy. On the other hand, Hannah has been totally devastated by her unnamed abuse so that she loses her sense of self, her womanhood, and her humanity.

Hannah's history is shrouded in the mystery of her origin. She was discovered washed up by "a storm so fierce it blew fish onto the land" (34). In turning the world upside down, this storm serves as a symbol of dislocation, an unsettled natural world. "Some people even thought the storm originated with [Hannah], that she'd stepped out of it just like she was passing through a cloud" (100). The storm symbolically washes away Hannah's history, so much so that Hannah becomes the storm, as if they were born out of each other. Bush tells Angel, "'your mother was like the wind...was a storm looking for a place to rage'" (76). Like the wind, Hannah is groundless; like the storm, she is displaced. Even her name, Hannah Wing, implies groundlessness, "as if she could fly, weightless as a bird catching a current of air" (345). If, as I've discussed, "names confer being," Hannah's name suggests a groundless essence to her being. Angel's name similarly has an ethereal quality. Hogan further develops the layers of meaning associated with the storm trope as Angel contemplates her own birth from "the place where storms are created" (108). The storm, as a symbol of disruption and dislocation, interferes with Hannah's ability to mother. Thus, the storm comes to represent the complex relationships between the instability of the natural world, the people's disconnection from their land and

history, the absence of identity, and the disruption of maternal bonds. Yet, paradoxically, landscape, history, identity, and motherhood are united in the storm trope.

Additionally, Hannah is disoriented in space. Agnes describes her as “the iron underground that pulls the needle of a compass to a false north” (12). This metaphor not only describes Hannah’s physical displacement but her spiritual disorientation as well. In his book *Between Earth and Sky: Legends of Native American Sacred Places*, Joseph Bruchac describes the spiritual significance of orienting self in relation to the four directions, “directions that correspond to our life cycle of birth, youth, adulthood, and the time of being an elder... there are the directions of the Earth and Sky.... The Seventh Direction, however, is harder to see. It is the direction within us all” (i). These spatiotemporal bearings inform a sense of self in relation to the world. Hannah, in her disorientation, lacks this sense of physical and spiritual being.

Bush describes Hannah’s loss of self as a necessary result of torture: “Her eyes... were dark and flat. No light. It was the expression the tortured wear.... She was no longer there” (98-99). Hannah’s essential self is separated from her body in a permanent dissociative state, what the old people call “soul loss.” At first, Bush worries about Hannah’s soul: “Where would a soul wander?” In Bush’s imagination, Hannah’s soul is displaced and lost. However, she soon realizes that Hannah’s dissociation is her only means of survival. Bush hopes “she’d been taken up into the hands of the sun.... Maybe that was where she went long ago... I hated to think of her still in that abused body” (100). Here, Hannah’s un-grounded soul means freedom from her abuse. Hannah’s soul has, instead, been replaced with “the ruins of humans” and the souls of her torturers, who continue a cycle of abuse against and through Hannah’s body (103). Thus, Hannah becomes the abused and the abuser, both victim and victimizer. The “terrible and violent force” which possesses Hannah “flesh, bone, and spirit” (22) rejects and abandons Angel, saying



“‘She’s not my baby’” (112). Violence replaces Hannah’s maternal instincts. It is not Hannah who attacks Angel, scarring her face, but Hannah’s body, invaded by her own abusers. When Angel meets Hannah, she “could see that there was no love inside her, nothing that could love [her], nothing that could ever have loved” (231). Crucially, Angel recognizes that Hannah’s body has been emptied of maternal love, just as she is emptied of mother’s milk.

The cycle of abuse that passes through Hannah and results in Angel’s literal and symbolic groundlessness begins as early as the night of her birth when Bush found Angel “tucked into the branches of a birch tree” (112). Hannah abuses her daughter, even threatens her life, by suspending her in a tree, simulating groundlessness. As a result of her mother’s abuse, Angel is placed in foster care: “All I had was a life on paper stored in file cabinets, a series of foster homes. I’d been lost from my own people, taken from my mother. One of the houses I’d lived in sloped as if it would fall off the very face of the earth... I had never lived anywhere long enough to call it home” (26). Angel’s sense of displacement is symptomatic of homelessness, of the government’s interference, and necessarily connected to a loss of culture, community, and family. Symbolically, the foster home described in this passage is groundless, so disconnected from the earth that it feels as if it could simply fall off. As a result of these experiences, Angel envisions herself as “the element of air, light and invisible, moving from place to place” (89). At this point, her identity is still informed by a groundless past that corresponds to a larger cultural displacement. Agnes says, “‘I don’t know where the beginning was, your story, ours...It might have started when the crying children were taken away from their mothers or when the logging camps started and cities were built from our woods, or when they cut the rest of the trees to raise cattle’” (40). Here, Hogan sets Angel’s personal displacement within a cultural context of groundlessness: the destruction of the land and the disruption of families. Angel’s story is

synonymous with the story of her people; both have lost their origins. Angel's journey is a search for her personal and cultural origins, to ground her identity: she "was traveling toward [herself] like rain falling into a lake, going home to a place [she'd] lived, still inside [her] mother" (26). Here we see that self, home, place, and motherhood are all essentially tied up in one another. Angel's search for self must also be a search for her mother, just as her search for her mother must also be a search for place.

It follows, then, that in order for Angel to reconnect with her mother, Hannah must be aligned with place. Although her soul is displaced in many ways, her physical body takes on characteristics of place: "She was a body under siege, a battleground" (99). Her scarred body mirrors the scarred landscape. Similarly, the battle for her body parallels the battle for land in the larger narrative of the novel. As Castor articulates, "the history of the dam projects, then, is magnified in the specific 'geography' of Hannah" (163). The devastation of the landscape is reenacted on Hannah's body. Old Man, an elder of the community, observes that Hannah's body is also a site of cultural devastation, where history is reenacted: "'She is the meeting place' ...where time and history and genocide gather and move like a cloud above the spilled oceans of blood. That little girl's body was the place where all this met" (101). At the same time that Hannah embodies destruction, Hogan creates a means by which the characters can reconnect to each other, to the land, and to the past through Hannah's body by demonstrating the oneness of the human body and the natural landscape as indistinct from each other. As Paula Gunn Allen states, "We are the land" (*Iyani* 191). Stacy Alaimo claims that in Hogan's poetry an "awareness of the body not only offers a sense of grounding for humans but also holds out the possibility for connections with nature that neither obliterate its differences nor reinforce hierarchies of beings" (133). This sense of grounding also occurs in *Solar Storms*. Castor argues that Hogan juxtaposes

Angel's growing empathy for and identification with the abused landscape with an increased landscaping of Hannah's abused body. As a result, Angel begins to identify with the landscape of Hannah's body: "It was death, finally, that allowed me to know my mother, her body the house of lament and sacrifice that it was" (*Solar Storms* 250). Hannah's connection to her mother follows Robert M. Nelson's assertion that in Native American fiction, "overcoming alienation by recovering identity is a matter of shaping one's vision and motion to a particular landscape, a process requiring surrender to the power of place rather than personal imposition upon it" (133). Angel must find herself and her history in the land.

Crucially, however, Angel doesn't come to identify with the land on her own. Only through the grounding forces of her grandmothers does Angel come to recognize herself in the landscape. Her grandmothers strengthen her relationship to the land, thereby allowing her to claim her personal and cultural identity. As I discuss the role of Dora-Rouge, Agnes, and Bush, I will engage with Roseanne Hoefel's essay "Narrative Choreography toward a New Cosmogony: The Medicine Way in Linda Hogan's Novel *Solar Storms*," in which she draws a parallel between Angel's journey in the novel and Paula Gunn Allen's conception of "the medicine way" in *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*. In her essay, Hoefel "chart[s] Angel's journey along the medicine way [the way of the daughter, the way of the householder, the way of the mother, the way of the gatherer and ritualist, the way of the teacher, and the way of the wise woman] as she consciously wills herself along a pathway of these qualities into her own authentic identity" (34). Hoefel argues that Dora-Rouge represents the way of the wise woman, Agnes represents the way of the teacher, while Bush represents the way of the gatherer and ritualist. While I concede that Hoefel makes a strong case for this reading of the novel, I believe that the primary imagery of grounding unites these grandmothers in purpose. I take

Hoefel's argument to the next step. Hogan's representation of the maternal medicine way serves to ground Angel, allowing her to identify with the land and consequently her mother, to perceive the world in terms of a cosmic motherhood, and, finally, to adopt the role of mother herself.

Agnes Iron is Angel's first "link to [her] mother," the first to shelter Angel (23). Angel believes that Agnes could be "be [her] salvation, that she would know [her] and remember all that had fallen away from [her] own mind" (27). Indeed, in the prologue, Agnes's italicized narrative is the first we receive, "for Agnes is the teacher, the wise elder" (Hoefel 34). Agnes's wisdom and healing power began with her maternal and sacrificial dedication to the last glacier bear "whose blue fur she still wears and shares with those most in need of healing" (35). Agnes sacrifices the sick bear just as Ama mercifully sacrifices the dying panther in *Power*. Dora-Rouge observes Agnes's enduring maternal relationship with the memory of the bear: "first thing every morning Agnes brushed the fur, rocking it in the chair...like it was a baby" (47- 48). When Agnes reaches out to Angel, wrapping her in the coat, she gathers Angel in a healing maternal embrace, saying "'When I wear this coat, Angel, I see the old forests, the northern lights, the nights that belong to something large that we don't know'" (54). Wearing the coat, Angel shares Agnes's experience and "enters a new empowering epistemology" (Hoefel 35) that erases the boundaries between herself and the landscape: "there were no boundaries...no walls, no skin, you would see me.... Some days you would see fire; other days, water. Or earth" (*Solar Storms* 54). Just as Omishto learns to see herself in the world as she journeys with Ama to find the panther, Angel enters a boundless way of knowing when she puts on the coat. The power of Agnes's bear coat lies in its connection to the landscape, to animal life, and its preservation of "the old songs no one else remembered" (55). Agnes's relationship with the bear allows her to speak the old language, the language of the animals. It represents a grounding force.

In her death, Agnes returns to the earth: “It was what Agnes had wanted, to be eaten by wolves and birds.... After that, on the chance that she had been eaten by wolves, I called every wolf I saw Grandmother” (216). Agnes’s identification with animal life consequently allows Angel to find family in the animal world. Angel incorporates a maternal relationship with the wolves into an expanded sense of family, just as Omishto adopts the panther as her own mother. As a result, Angel’s own identity changes: “This was Angel Iron, as I now called myself” (217). In an empowering moment, Angel takes on Agnes’s name as more suited to her increasingly grounded identity. In contrast to Hannah *Wing*, whose name connotes groundlessness, *Iron* locates Angel’s identity in the deep elemental earth. Whereas Hannah is physically and spiritually disoriented, Angel’s new name reflects a magnetic alignment with the four directions, orienting Angel in space, in relation to physical, natural, and spiritual realms. Her full name, Angel Iron, joins her groundless past with her new grounded future in one united identity.

Like Agnes, Bush’s identity is inseparable from animal life. When Angel first meets Bush she thinks she is “a deer, thin and brown, smelling the direction of the wind.... She seemed rooted where she stood” (67). In fact Angel thinks Bush has “the brilliant soul of an animal,” which, like Agnes, allows Bush to enter a boundless way of knowing the world (95). Angel is immediately impressed by Bush’s grounding presence. “Bush stood barefoot in that dark, newly exposed clay, as if she’d just been created by one of the gods who made us out of earth, as if she’d risen up like first woman, still and awed by the creation” (67). Here, Angel envisions Bush as the ground itself, made out of earth, still in the process of creation. Indeed, “[t]he island itself was a place of undone, unfinished things and incomplete creations” (68). Already, Angel begins to recognize herself in the landscape. In Bush’s reconstruction of animal bodies and in her efforts to reclaim the land, she demonstrates “a great brokenness moving, trying to move, toward

wholeness” (86). As Angel follows Bush’s example in rebuilding her life, she reaches “a central discovery in [her] unraveling and reweaving of her life and place” (Hoefel 36): “Perhaps that is what I went there to do, to put together all the pieces of history, of my life, and my mother’s, to make something whole” (86). Bush encourages the development of Angel’s holistic identity by reconstructing her personal history, the story of her mother, and a deeper cultural past as necessarily interconnected.

In these ways, Bush recreates a family. Angel says Bush “was the closest thing I had to a mother” and after Dora-Rouge’s death, Bush remains as Angel’s primary mother (182). In adopting and mentoring Angel, Bush grounds her in a sense of interconnection. Angel’s identification with the landscape is necessary to the realization of Angel’s whole self. Through Bush’s mentorship, Angel sees “the watery paths...sure as tributaries of my own blood” (137). Catherine Rainwater emphasizes Hogan’s water trope as it relates to Angel’s “discovery of power” (*Intertextual Twins* 102). This power originates in her growing identification with the land until her “heart and the beat of the land...were becoming the same thing” (236). This imagery of water and blood evokes a sense of maternal landscape, represented here by the “water” of birth, the “blood” tie of family, and the heartbeat of the womb, as Angel begins to recognize her own mother in the landscape: “We were shaped out of this land by the hands of gods. Or maybe it was that we embodied the land. And in some way I could not yet comprehend, it also embodied my mother, both of them stripped and torn” (228). In this passage, Angel realizes the interrelationship between the land, herself, and her mother, allowing her to identify with Hannah’s body.

Throughout the novel, Angel increasingly identifies with her web of grand/mothers by describing the reciprocal relationship between land and self. This interconnection is evident as

Angel describes Dora-Rouge as “a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending offshoots, growing. I watched and listened. It was an old world in which I began to bloom. Their stories called me home” (48). In every sense of the word “grounding,” Dora-Rouge grounds Angel. She allows Angel to take root, to find home. In the imagery of the family tree described here, Dora-Rouge connects Angel to her ancestry, to an “old world.” This ancestral heritage is literally and figuratively grounded; Dora-Rouge is a stabilizing force that allows Angel to grow, to bloom. Through their relationship, the old world is reborn: “Dora-Rouge, who insisted she was born new every day, was the closest thing to God. And I was partly made in the old woman’s image, right down to the owl-beak nose and dark, curved brows, and when she spoke the days of creation, I believed in them” (182). In this passage, Hogan revises Christian symbolism to recast Dora-Rouge as a maternal deity, thus creating a sense of “cosmogyny,” described by Paula Gunn Allen as a cosmic order centered on gynocratic principles. Crucially, Dora-Rouge’s own cosmogyny is grounded: “‘I love the ground,’ she said. ‘It’s my God’” (312). The earth is Dora-Rouge’s maternal deity. Similarly, after walking on God Island, Angel becomes aware “that God was everything beneath my feet” (170). Angel’s “evolving conceptualization of God” is grounded (Hoefel 38). Through her relationship with Dora-Rouge, Angel comes to believe in a cosmic order based in the maternal natural world, in a process of continual creation through the generative power of stories, an “ongoing process” that extends beyond the biblical conception of Genesis (181). By the end of the novel, Angel’s spiritual acuity is evident: “Maybe our earth, our sky, will give birth to something, perhaps there’s still another day of creation, and the earth is only a little boat with men and women, slugs and manta rays, all floating in a shell across the dark blue face of a god” (348). Here, Angel perceives the earth in terms of its regenerative

maternal power. The imagery of this passage also evokes a cyclical sense of time, in which the past exists simultaneously with the present and the future. Dora-Rouge's spiritual journey represents this cycle: "Dora-Rouge, the woman going home, was going backward in her memory as well, in the way a single life travels a closed circle" (167). For Angel, Dora-Rouge's journey backward in memory grounds her own personal and cultural memory in a "deep past" (168). Dora-Rouge is Angel's connection to a grounded cultural and spiritual heritage centered on motherhood.

Duly representative of this life-cycle, Angel finds Dora-Rouge "surrounded by ferns, mosses, and the deep green of spring. Although she was white-haired and withered, she was curled up like an infant waiting to be born" (348). Hoefel claims that this fetal imagery at Dora-Rouge's death symbolizes a "supernatural rebirth" (41). More appropriately, though, Hogan repeats and inverts the symbolism of the family tree to represent death and rebirth in line with the natural cycle of the seasons: "She died easily, soft as a leaf falling from a tree that knew new leaves, branches, and roots would unfold, a tree that had the power of its belief that spring would one day come" (349). This transitional imagery suggests "[t]here is no death. Only a change of worlds" (*Sacred* 198). Hoefel argues that the inversion of this symbolism "serves as a prelude to a more poignant inversion when the way of the bereaved (great grand-) daughter transfigures in an instant...to the 'patient way' of the mother: 'I sat with her body, rocking her in my lap' (349)" (41). As Angel cradles the infant body of her grandmother, she inhabits the role of mother. Hogan offers us an alternative conception of motherhood, one that is not defined by physical maternity but by the act of mothering. As Hoefel observes, Angel's metamorphosis occurs during a comforting "soft female rain" which envelops them in "sun, meteor showers, and cosmic dust" (349); this imagery is significant from a cosmogynist perspective (41).



Motherhood serves as the connection between generations, extending both backward and forward, in line with a cosmic order of cyclical rebirth and renewal.

After Dora-Rouge's death, Hoefel suggests that she is reborn through Angel. Angel "becomes a conduit for [her] energy and wisdom" as she observes the "gynocentric cosmos" (41): "Sometimes the aurora borealis moves across night, strands of light that remind me of a spider's web or a fishnet cast out across the starry skies to pull life in toward it. At other times it reminds me of the lines across a pregnant woman's belly" (349). Whereas Hoefel leaves this quotation to speak for itself, the imagery of this passage warrants further analysis in order to understand the ways in which motherhood functions at the end of the novel. Here, Angel envisions the universe as a mother's body. In this way, Hogan anthropomorphizes the cosmos so that Angel now perceives the spiritual world as part of a maternal framework of creation. This framework combines imagery of native motherhood (the spider's web evokes "Grandmother Spider") with an allusion to Christ (the fishnet evokes Christ's title "Fisher of Men"). Although the fishnet is not necessarily an allusion to Christian mythology, such an allusion fits Hogan's pattern of incorporating both native and Christian symbolism into her imagery, often as a revision of Christian tradition. In this way, Angel's spiritual perception is "based in tradition but fits with the new circumstances in which [she] finds [herself]" (*Euro-Think* 8). In this passage, motherhood is a means of adaptation by representing the union of two seemingly disparate systems of belief.

Crucially, Angel's entry into this "gynocentric" universe depends on her contemplation of the aurora borealis. Here, Hogan alludes to Angel's half-sister Aurora, whom Angel has adopted. Thus, Angel perceives cosmogyny through her own motherhood. Angel finds her baby sister as she watches over Hannah on her deathbed. As Hannah's life ebbs, Angel mothers the

baby, cradles her, gives her milk, and chews up meat stew to feed her. Foreshadowing her role in Dora-Rouge's death, Angel navigates the threshold between life and death through an act of mothering. Upon Hannah's death, Aurora's life gives hope to the revival efforts of her people: "a new life that had formed in this place where some hundred-year-old history was breaking itself apart and trying to reform" (249). After Hannah dies, Angel names her baby sister Aurora. However, Tulik, a grandfather figure to Angel, "began to call Aurora 'my grandfather,' and he named her privately after his mother's father, Totshoi, which meant Storm'" (257). Aurora's name, "Storm," evokes a reincarnated Hannah, insofar as she was described as a storm. Aurora is also Tulik's grandfather reborn. Thus, Aurora symbolizes the dual devastation and renewal of her people and her heritage. Significantly, Aurora is "the child of many parents. We shared in her care" (264). At the same time that Aurora's many mothers emphasizes the absence of Aurora's biological mother and represents the scattering of her family, it unifies the community in the responsibility of motherhood for creating and maintaining cultural identity. Hoefel suggests that "Hannah's baby sustains them through their... protest, as they each assume the way of the mother now gone....The gentle men, like Tommy and Tulik, assume nurturing stances, as well" (39-40). Just as it does in *Tracks* and *Power*, motherhood lies in the act of mothering, not in biological maternity. Through Aurora, "shared responsibility for mothering emphasizes the [Native American] sense of interconnectedness of all life, the responsibility of each person to care for others" (Wong 191). The community invests their hope in Aurora, who they call "Our Future" (318). For Angel, Aurora is an anchor, grounding the future: "Yes, the pieces were infinite and worn, and our human pain was deep, but we'd thrown an anchor into the future and followed the rope to the end of it, to where we would dream new dreams, new medicines, and one day, once again, remember the sacredness of every living thing" (344). Hogan ultimately

acknowledges the divisive pain of historical destruction at the same time that she provides hope for cultural renewal and familial reunion in the future through motherhood. As Angel adopts a maternal role she is able to envision a revitalized world that unites “new dreams” and “new medicines” with the old knowledge of “the sacredness of every living thing.”

### **Conclusion**

*I am politicized rather than paralyzed by the struggles*

- Linda Hogan in “*The Two Lives*”

Motherhood holds cultural relevance in the novels of Linda Hogan and Louise Erdrich in the way that it represents the most painful kind of cultural devastation at the same time that it encapsulates the pan-Indian belief that motherhood is reciprocally related to the earth, spirituality, and the continuation of culture. Motherhood is therefore essential to a Native American sense of individual and community identity. However, these novels do not romanticize motherhood, nor do they dwell in the pain of cultural devastation. Instead, they incorporate both these meanings into one unifying conception of motherhood. Both authors contrast a disrupted biological mother/daughter relationship, which is symbolically groundless, with a grounding surrogate mother relationship. In these novels, motherhood exposes the continual exploitation of native people and the environment. It is also the means by which individuals adapt to the changing modern world and Native American communities revivify their cultural identity. All three novels use the symbolic duality of motherhood to represent the fragmentation of community at the same time that they solidify community and create a sense of interrelatedness with natural and spiritual worlds. In doing so, these novels embody a more comprehensive

worldview in line with Native American holistic values. Both authors, adoptive mothers themselves, ultimately depict adoptive motherhood as a necessary force for the integration of individual and communal identities with a grounded sense of place and past.

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### Author's Biography

Elise Doney, raised in East Hampton, Connecticut, graduated in 2005 from East Hampton High School. She entered Utah State University that fall as an English major, with an emphasis in Education. As a Supplemental Instruction leader for Psychology 1010, Elise found that she was passionate about teaching, and good at it. However, it wasn't until she read *The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday in her third semester that she fell immediately in love with Native American literature, and changed her major to Literary Studies. Although Elise knows that teaching is still in her future, her Literary Studies degree has given her the chance to develop her critical thinking and writing skills, to build a solid foundation of research, and to foster mentor relationships with the faculty of the English Department.

Elise has also been actively involved with GLBTA services throughout her college career. She has volunteered for the Gay and Lesbian Resource Center, participated as an OUTspoken panelist, served as a facilitator for Allies on Campus, devoted her early mornings to the Student Advisory Council to work towards a more inclusive campus, and presented a workshop entitled "Are You There God? It's Me Queer Activist": How to Have Difficult Conversations in Conservative Climates" at the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce annual conference Creating Change. Elise is dedicated to cultural and political equality.

After graduation, Elise will take a year off to drive across the country until her money runs out before applying to graduate school in pursuit of a MFA in Folklore.